



## Massachusetts – National Organization for Women Inc.

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### **HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS AND JUDICIARY COMMITTEES**

#### TESTIMONY OF MASS NOW IN SUPPORT OF

S.2800, the Reform, Shift and Build Act

June 17, 2020

Dear Chair Cronin, Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Day, Vice Chair Garlick, and Members of the House Ways and Means and Judiciary Committees, I am Sasha Goodfriend, President of the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization of Women (Mass NOW). I am pleased to offer this testimony on behalf of Mass NOW, an organization that has been leading the pursuit of equity and building intersectional feminism in the Commonwealth for over 50 years.

I am writing to express my support for strong police reform and accountability legislation as the House considers S.2800, the Reform, Shift and Build Act, which recently passed the Senate. We must address police violence and abuses, stop the disparate policing of and brutality against communities of color and Black people in particular, and hold police accountable for civil rights violations. These changes are essential for the health and safety of our communities here in the Commonwealth.

We decry those who would argue that police reform would leave women and other victims of domestic abuse behind. We know that these victims, especially Black women, are already afraid to call the police as it may only escalate the violence. Victims must weigh the decision to call for help for themselves knowing that it may result in their partner becoming a victim of the responding officer. In fact, qualified immunity protects these responding police even when they blatantly and seriously violate people's civil rights, including by excessive use of force resulting in permanent injury or even death. For this reason we believe meaningful police reform must include ending qualified immunity.

We also know that LGBTQ youth are twice as likely to enter the juvenile justice system as their non-LGBTQ peers, while LGBTQ youth of color are 4 times more likely to be incarcerated as white youth. An estimated 85% of LGBTQ youth in the justice system are youth of color. Various forces contribute to the overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth in the juvenile justice system, including discrimination and stigma that increase the number of incidents of harassment and violence against LGBTQ youth. Discrimination and stigma may also result in policies and policing strategies that disproportionately target LGBTQ youth, especially youth of color.

Massachusetts has one of the worst racial disparities for youth incarceration in the country and lacks transparency on how our legal system responds to children and youth once they are

arrested and how they move through the system. Legislation to shed light on racial inequity in our juvenile justice system was stripped from the 2018 criminal justice reform legislation due to opposition to any transparency that would reveal the disparate treatment of Black and Brown youth by our legal system. Any police reform legislation would include data transparency measures that gather key demographic data at major decision points in the justice system.

There is broad consensus that we must act swiftly and boldly to address police violence, strengthen accountability, and advance racial justice. We urge you to pass the strongest possible legislation without delay, and to ensure that it is signed into law this session.

Thank you for your time,

Sasha Goodfriend  
Mass NOW President  
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